

at Chess, Lay argues that ‘the Black Queen’s Pawn creates a space for monastic disobedience’ akin to the allowable disobedience outlined by Gertrude in her print and manuscript writings.

Chapter 4 ‘Cloisters and Country Houses: Women’s Literary Communities’ focuses on ‘alternate narratives of English literary history, which become legible when we shift our focus away from the traces of Catholic women in canonical literature and toward traces of canonical literature in communities associated with the convent’ (p. 120). Chief among her case studies are the Aston-Thimelby coterie and letter network situated at Tixall in Staffordshire, and St Monica’s convent, Louvain, and this group’s engagement with the works of Southwell and Donne. The chapter also analyzes Marvell’s *Upon Appleton House* and the function of literary consumption in *The Convent of Pleasure*. While the latter makes no explicit mention of Catholicism or doctrinal controversies ‘Cavendish nevertheless points to convents not only as places of female community and refuge from men but also of literary creation’ (p. 157) thus suggesting that actual Catholic convents may have offered women literary opportunities and other freedoms.

In the Epilogue, ‘Failures of Literary History’, Lay examines Passion poems by Donne, Milton, Crashaw, George Herbert, and an anonymous author recorded in Constance Aston Fowler’s verse miscellany (from Tixall), arguing that we must be alive to the early modern religious prejudices that have shaped our modern canon. Lay moves on to conclude that ‘Catholic women unsettle and disrupt narrative, form, and genre, forcing us to bring renewed attention even to those poems and plays that seem not at all concerned with them’ (p. 171). This argument lies at the heart of what will make this book successful in the eyes of some readers, and hard to swallow for others. For those who need concrete evidence of influence, readership and active response on the part of one writer to another, *Beyond the Cloister* will prove a difficult read. But for those interested in the ways that ideas moved across confessionally divided communities and manifested at both the centre and the margin, *Beyond the Cloister* provides a fascinating methodology and new avenues of approach.

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Richard G. Williams, ed. *Mannock Strickland 1683–1744. Agent to English Convents in Flanders. Letters and Accounts from Exile*, Catholic Record Society Record Series 86, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016, pp. lxxxii + 341, £50.00, ISBN: 978-0-902832-30-5

In 1905, the Catholic Record Society embarked upon a monumental enterprise: the publication of edited primary sources documenting the

lives of English Catholics, lay and religious, from the early modern era onwards. In 1968, the Records Series was completed with a Monograph Series, which now boasts a strong back catalogue of specialist monograph publications.

Richard G. Williams's edition of Mannock Strickland's papers, like all CRS publications, is a high-quality production and a beautiful book; it even contains a few illustrations, an increasing rarity considering the costs involved. The volume falls into three main sections: a lengthy and detailed introduction; the primary sources themselves, with annotations; and the appendices, which provide very useful complementary elements including biographical details of the people mentioned in the text.

In his 81-page introduction, the editor retraces the relevant elements pertaining to the biography of Mannock John Strickland (1683–1744), a counsellor-at-law and one of a small and select group of English Catholic lawyers who worked to secure the finances and estates of their fellow co-religionists. Because of his faith and of his Jacobite affiliations, Strickland was never called to the Bar despite having the highest form of legal training as a barrister; he was, however, a respected member of Gray's Inn from 1704 to 1732, when he moved to Lincoln's Inn, which was known as a base of support for Catholics in London. Williams notes that, like that of some of his close associations, Strickland's clientèle indicates that the vital strength of the recusant community in England was no longer the nobility but rather the gentry, as Gabriel Glickman's recent monograph has suggested. He also points out that female clients accounted for a very high proportion of Strickland's clientele, and underlines this female predominance as a 'striking aspect' of the archive (p. xxii), echoing the now widely-accepted notion that women, both lay and religious, played a particularly important part in the life, organisation and survival of the English Catholic community.

After a brief evocation of the religious, political and economic contexts in which the English Catholic community organised its continued existence in spite of stringent penal laws, the editor presents the primary sources which form his corpus. Eight years after Strickland's death, his son-in-law Michael Blount II (1719–92) transferred his papers from London to his country home at Mapledurham House, where the editor is librarian and archivist. Here they are transcribed as a complete set, without any omissions, offering a timely and most welcome contribution to the growing interest in the history of the English convents in exile.

This edition compiles the letters, the account books and miscellaneous papers documenting the affairs between Strickland and four English convents in exile on the Continent—the Augustinian Canonesses of St Monica at Louvain, the Dominicans of the Spellikens at Brussels, and the Benedictines of Dunkirk and Brussels, for whom he also acted as a banker. The variety of letters, and of legal and financial documents add

nuance and detail to the picture presented by the publication of the six volumes of edited primary sources compiled and edited by Caroline Bowden and her project team for the *Who Were the Nuns?* project.

Most of the letters reproduced in this volume pertain to the convent of St Monica's and were written by Cecily Tunstall, the community's Procuratrix; there are also several documents from the Spellikens; those concerned with the Benedictines, however, form only a very small proportion of the edition. As a body of text, the letters show the staunch Jacobitism of the houses, strengthening the case for the political activism of English nuns, traced by Caroline Bowden and Claire Walker. Arguably however, what they illustrate most clearly is the distress of communities who appear to have lived in a constant state of financial crisis. Strickland's major role with them was that of a debt collector, since convents often did not manage to secure the payments of sums due either for boarding, for portions and dowries or for the return of sums invested.

In his description of Cecily Tunstall, the Augustinian Procuratrix, Williams is at times quite harsh: repeatedly, he describes her as demanding and impatient (pp. xxxv, xlix, l, lv, lvi), 'unforgiving' (p. xxxvi) and 'blunt' (p. xxxvii), but surely her attitude belied her genuine anxiety regarding the financial stability of her house. When debts ran for several years, as the documents show, it can be no surprise that communities were plunged in such distress that they became quite pressing with the agent in charge of their affairs. For these women, as Williams points out, it was a matter of survival, since their situation meant that they were entirely dependent upon Strickland; English nuns were 'doubly dead' to the world (p. lxxi), isolated legally both as women and as Catholic, and geographically because of their exile and their vow of enclosure. Moreover, communication with their relatives and networks in England was problematic, since letters at times miscarried or remained unanswered, thereby exacerbating the nuns' sense of alienation.

The letters and account books edited here therefore testify that to be an English religious woman in the eighteenth century was to experience a constant sense of urgency and of worry regarding an uncertain future. As such they also reveal a lot more than the financial contours of the houses concerned: they tell us about how it felt to be an English nun in exile. They also tell readers about the nuns' reading habits, their medical needs and their personal, physical experience of religious life on the Continent. Clearly, they provide a highly valuable source for future research, and this volume will be a mine of information to those interested in the lives of early modern Catholic nuns.

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